MAGAZINE and BOOK SECTION

New York Tribune

MAGAZINE and BOOK SECTION

PART VII TWELVE PAGES — SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 22, 1920 — PART VII TWELVE PAGES

Is the "Irish Volcano" Dormant or Extinct? On the Surface the Isle Is Strangely Quiet

The "State of Rebellion" Exists, For the Present at Least, Only In the People's Minds

By Frank W. Getty
From The Tribune's European Bureau

Foreword

UPON arriving in Ireland to-day, one enters into a vast labyrinth of conflicting interests. No sooner has one solved the economic riddle than one runs up against the blind wall of religion; the political issue confounds the solver of the religious problems; the financial difficulties confuse the solution of the political tangle; the interests of the North are, here, diametrically opposed to those of the South; there, inseparably interwoven with them.

After traveling through Ireland, North, South and stormy West, and talking with leaders of every train of thought, priests and politicians, bankers and business men, officials and nobodies, I have come to the conclusion that there is not one Irish problem, but 4,381,398 of them, according to the latest census. And as for solutions, the profane jarvey who drives you from the station in his jaunting car seems to come every bit as close to a workable answer to the hydra-headed problem as the most astute statesman who has yet expressed an opinion.

With this in mind, it is obviously impracticable to attempt to discuss, in a single article, the Irish situation as a whole. Let us leave, then, for future issues of The Tribune discussion of the political and religious aspects, the economic and financial aspects, the psychological and sentimental aspects of the Irish situation, and merely see what manner of people they are that dwell in this little storm center of the world to-day—what they talk about, think about and want.

CHAPTER I

Ireland To-day

THERE is a statement, freely circulated from England to-day, that Ireland is in a "state of open rebellion." This is manifestly overstating the case. In certain wilder sections of the South and West there are frequent demonstrations, usually entailing violence, on the part of the "Republican army." There are sharp and instant reprisals on the part of the police and military. But, compared with the sensational reports, the country is strangely peaceful. Ulster is quiet; the larger cities are orderly; in the country districts the people who go about their farming without mingling in the day's politics are undisturbed; even in Dublin most of the "crime" consists in individual feuds between police and citizens.

The trouble is that the spotlight of an unsympathetic press is instantly turned on every crime and deed of violence in such a way as to make it appear part of a general rebellious movement among that section of the Irish people which desires independence. Whereas, in a majority of cases, this is not so.

The "state of rebellion" exists. But only, at present, in the minds of the people. Ireland is by no means on the brink of revolution. There are many in Ireland who would like to start one, but they lack the power as yet; the country is not prepared for an open break and a revolution would be broken before it fairly began. I am convinced of one thing—with proper exercise of authority on the part of the military (and this is a most important aspect of the situation), whatever rebellion is smoldering at present can be postponed, perhaps to that indefinite day when some one will hit upon a practicable solution of the problem.

As for those sections of the South and West—Kerry, Cork, Tipperary—wherein occur most of the disturbances, it must be realized that a large section of the population considers itself in a state of war—war "between Ireland and England." It justifies occasional outbursts of guerrilla warfare, such as the besieging of police barracks, on that ground. For every reported Sinn Féin raid for arms, it points to a dozen similar raids by government troops. For every policeman shot down it has a list of wrongs against the community to lay at his door.

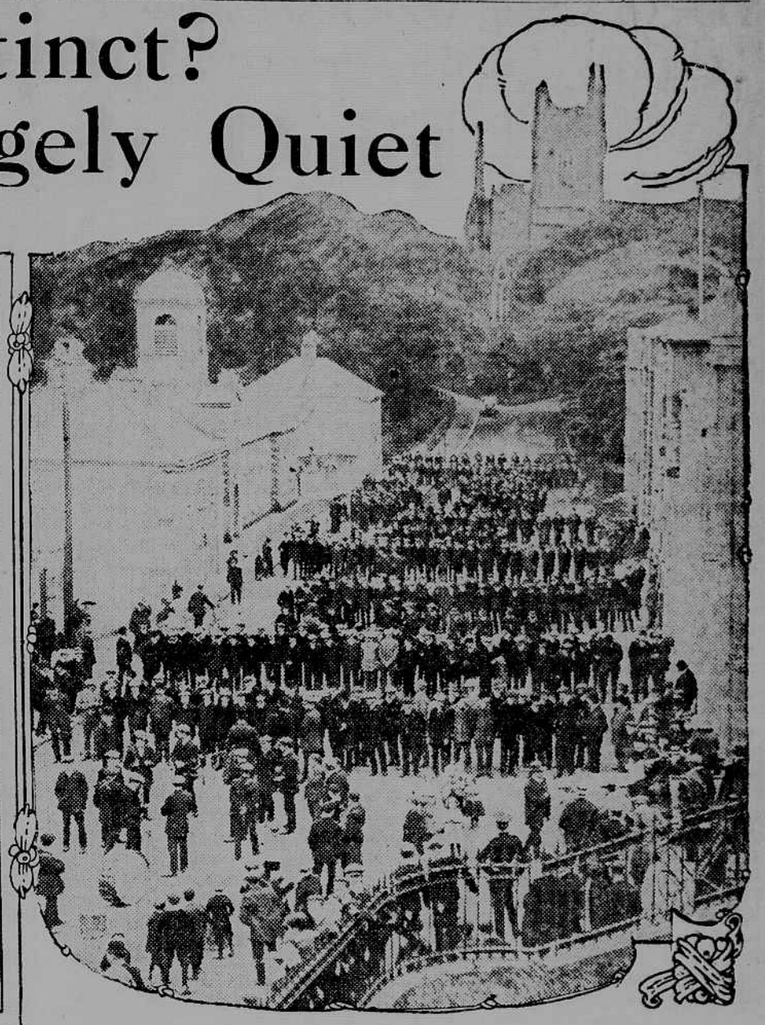
I have heard repeated, so many times and from such reputable sources that I hesitate to consider it untrue, the following statement:

That the police and military have up to the present made more than 2,000 raids upon the houses and offices of Irish citizens, whatever their politics; that men and women have been dragged from their beds in the middle of the night, stripped and searched; that the furniture in hundreds of houses has been destroyed under the pretext of search for arms; that children have been threatened with bayonets to make them disclose the whereabouts of relatives.

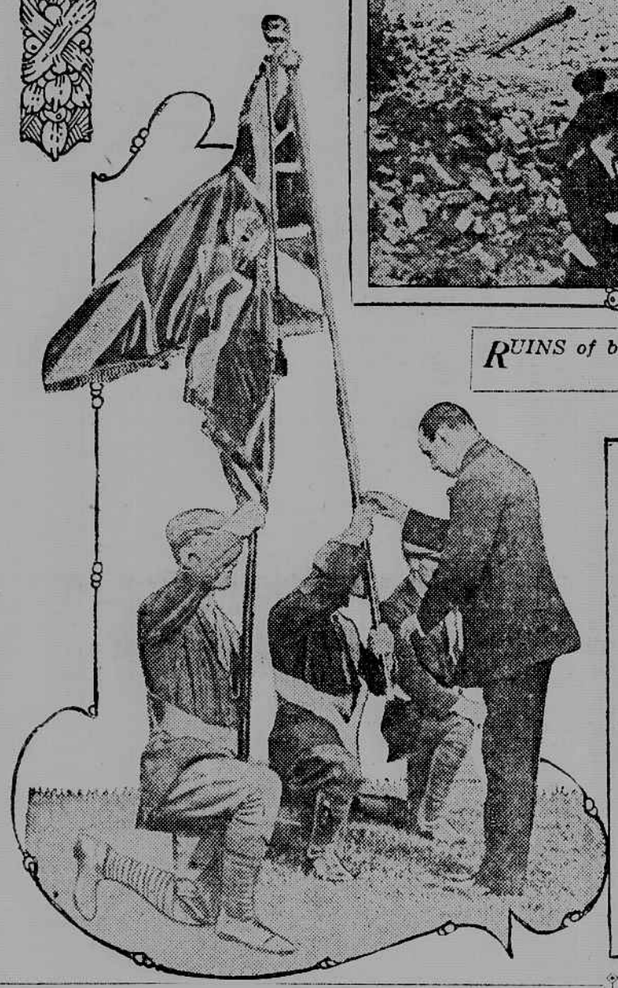
All these things are going on nightly, Sinn Féin claims and believes, and in that belief justifies, in a measure, the crimes laid at its door.

There is another phase of the situation which must be considered. The crimes, murders and burglaries committed in Ireland to-day are by no means entirely the act of Sinn Féiners or their sympathizers. It is Sinn Féin's claim that a great majority is not. To ex-soldiers of the criminal class and unjailed outlaws they rightly attribute most of the outrages which, described in the press as "Sinn Féin crimes," are frequent in this country to-day.

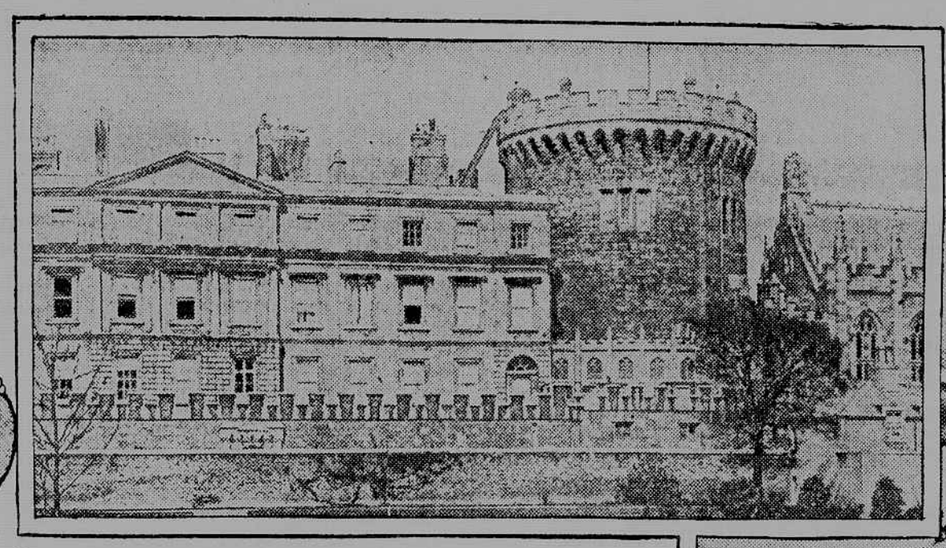
RUINS of buildings in Dublin destroyed in the course of the fighting in the cause and the uprising against British rule in 1916



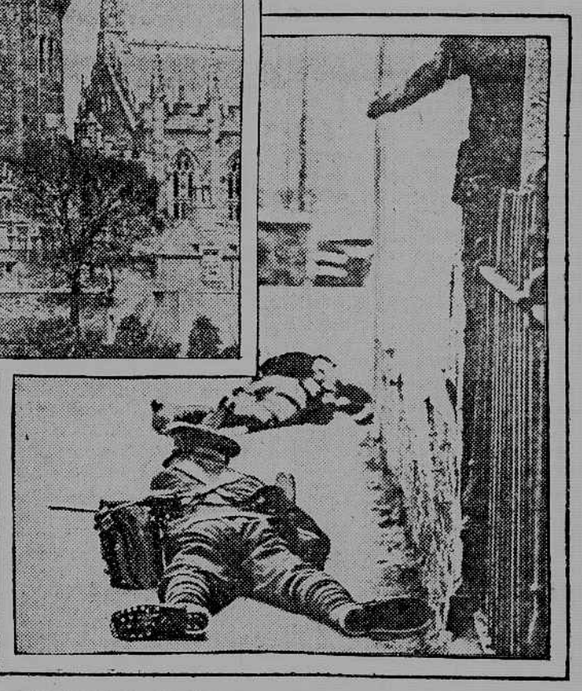
ULSTERITES of Belfast drilling for "any eventuality." There is said to be an Ulster army prepared to fight against southern Ireland's army of independence



ULSTER soldiers taking the oath of allegiance to the British flag. Ulster is proud of its service in the war



DUBLIN CASTLE, around which raged the Irish rebellion of 1916



BRITISH soldiers stalking snipers during the fighting in Dublin in 1916

CHAPTER II

What Sinn Fein Is

SINN FEIN is the biggest, the most misunderstood thing in Ireland to-day. It is at once the most complete and the most elastic organization of its kind with which a mother country has ever had to contend. It is founded upon a natural sentiment and based upon those sincere, if misguided, convictions which must underlie every successful revolutionary movement. It believes in an independent Ireland. In its belief it overlooks two main considerations: First, it would be impracticable for England to have an independent and unsympathetic Ireland ever at her elbow; second, a considerable proportion of the Irish people, those in the North, do not desire that independence.

Sinn Féin has grown from a secret society to the most powerful political organization in Ireland. Although hampered in many ways by official hostility, its members swept the recent proportional representation elections, and, combined with labor, Sinn Féin put in more candidates than all other parties combined.

Its members are now, for the most part, young men. They comprise the best (and, of course, the worst) type of young Irishmen, who, prevented by the war from emigrating to America, have taken up politics at home and have entered heart and soul into the game of delivering Ireland from England. It was surprising to find them, for the most part, extremely clean-living. I learned that their leaders are bound to strict temperance, their active members to sobriety. But they are rebels, every one of them, and as long as British law is dominant in a British possession they will always be in the wrong.

I have said that Sinn Féin's organization is complete and elastic. It is complete in that its underground information system is the most perfect I have ever encountered. After I had been in Ireland twenty-four hours I failed to meet a Sinn Féiner who could not tell me all about myself, where I was staying, why I had come to Ireland and where I had been at 4 o'clock the preceding day. Its rules are obeyed, its leaders recognized.

The report that a large element is getting out of hand proved unfounded. But Sinn Féin is elastic in that it has the sympathy of nine out of every ten persons south of Ireland's "Mason and Dixon line." The chambermaid in your hotel, the jarvey who drives you about, the clerk in the shoe store, may not be Sinn Féiners, but they are extremely sympathetic, even to the extent of frustrating the law in its pursuit of Sinn Féiners whenever possible. The favorite opening sentence of an interview with almost any prominent Irishman of the South or West is:

"Now, I'm not a Sinn Féiner myself, but"——

And every act of coercion and oppression on the part of the authorities adds new names to the long Sinn Féin rolls.

As for the "Republican army," with its hundreds of thousands of trained men ready to fight at an instant's notice, it is nowhere in evidence. There is a lot of "leg-pulling," favorite sport of Irishmen, going on about this mysterious force, but since the dangerous areas in Ireland have been proclaimed and put under martial law there has been more fancy than fact abroad about these troops.

It seems strange to an outsider coming to Ireland for the first time to find Sinn Féiners walking abroad in the streets at every turn, even those known to be "wanted" by the police, many of whom have escaped from the prisons to which they were consigned for political offenses. But even their leader himself, or deputy leader, during de Valera's absence in the United States, Arthur Griffith, walks the streets in perfect freedom. I sat for two hours talking with Griffith in a little front parlor whose windows were uncurtained and looked out upon St. Stephen's Green, scene of so many recent disturbances. Policemen walked past at frequent intervals, looked in, but paid no attention to the chief of the rebels.

For my benefit, when I first sought to interview Griffith, there was arranged an elaborate bit of horseplay which deceived no one. I was mysteriously informed by telephone one afternoon:

"He is there now."

This cryptic message was followed by the sudden appearance of a Sinn Féin press agent who, with solemnity befitting the occasion, conducted me on foot through dark Dublin streets until we arrived at a coal office, a short distance from the police headquarters. Here, after mysterious rappings, the door was opened and I was conducted into a pitch-black alleyway, where I was told to stand. My guide disappeared. I stood for nearly fifteen minutes. Then he reappeared with the information that Griffith could not be seen, and I was ushered out.

All this for the benefit of a temperamental American reporter; for the next afternoon Griffith was to be seen, not only by me but by any one who happened to be around, and without any of the formulæ of the preceding evening.

CHAPTER III

Arthur Griffith

I FOUND the "Acting President of the Irish Republic" a short, stocky man, with iron-gray hair and violently waxed mustache, watery eyes concealed behind double-lensed glasses, plainly dressed and wearing a tan raincoat and soft felt hat. He was the antithesis of my anticipation. There is nothing of the fiery leader of a lost cause about Griffith. Nor is there in his manner of speech. He sits stolidly, unemotionally, answering questions with precision but without originality, displaying a marvelous grasp on Irish history and Irish economics, from the Sinn Féin point of view. As a prompter he had at his elbow the best known of Sinn Féin press agents.

There was little new for America in what Griffith had to say. He could repeat verbatim statements from any of the Sinn Féin leaflets which a busy press bureau has inflicted upon the world for the last six months. The arguments are good, but they are all one sided. Irishmen won't take one set of admitted facts and argue about them; each has his own complement.

Griffith preferred refuting arguments of Ulster and England to advocating those of his own. I was interested in hearing his justification of Sinn Féin's part in the recent wave of crime which has partly engulfed Ireland and probably done more than anything else to alienate public sympathy.

His reply to the question "Do you want to deny, or justify, the recent murders attributed to Sinn Féin?" was quite as general as that which I have outlined above.

(1) Sinn Féin didn't commit all the crimes with which it was charged. Ex-soldiers and criminals generally were responsible for a majority of them.

(2) The police who were shot usually had records of many wrongs which they personally had inflicted on the community.

I asked Griffith if Sinn Féin looked forward to any political developments, such as a workable Home Rule bill, which it would consider a step in the right direction.

"Nothing but a sharp, definite break with England will satisfy us," he replied. "Our aim is complete independence."

CHAPTER IV

Three Other Groups

BESIDES Sinn Féin, which stands, as can be seen, for complete independence, however secured, there are in the South of Ireland three other political groups, to one or more of which, of course, every one belongs.

There are the Nationalists, who believe in Ireland as a nation, but do not profess to go so far as Sinn Féin in securing this. Then there are the Dominion Home Rulers, those who want for Ireland the sort of home rule enjoyed by Canada at the present time, comprising virtually economic independence and the freedom of raising armies and navies and collecting taxes.

Lastly, one finds as most moderate of them all the Home Rulers, of the Sir Horace Plunkett school, who are striving to find a way out without causing too much embarrassment to England. Purely from the political point of view there has arisen recently, besides these, a Labor party, but it has no place in the scheme of things relating to Irish independence.

All these groups, in varying degrees, desire a change. And as they embrace more than 90 per cent of the population of the South and West, it is little wonder that there is unrest. For the most part, they want varying degrees of independence from Great Britain. If we are to take a hasty glance at the people of the North, there will be no time in this article to enter upon a discussion of the impracticability or the justice of their wants. Suffice it to say this — although each group turned out its best and most convincing attorneys in an attempt to prove to me the practicability of its scheme, there was not one of the whole lot which did not fail to do so. I had come to Ireland with the preconceived notion that there must be some way out. And I am going back, admitting defeat. For, sympathetic as I was with the Southern point of view and plausible as their arguments sounded, I found time to ask each:

"What about Ulster?"

And the reply was invariably emphatic and uncomplimentary to Ulster.

CHAPTER V

The Northern Viewpoint

WHAT about Ulster? What does she want? It was far easier to get a unanimous, clear-cut reply to this question during my brief one-day visit to Belfast than in all the days I had spent in the South trying to hit upon the highest common factor of Southern aspirations.

"Leave us alone."

There it was, in three words. Ulster desires, asks nothing more than to be left alone. She is happy and prosperous under Britain. She would not tolerate or consider for an instant separation from the mother country. Her people are Irishmen, proud to call themselves such; but they are Britons, just as loyal to Great Britain as though the brief stretch of Irish Sea did not separate them from the mainland of England.

Ulster's greatest pride, next to her industries, or perhaps even ahead of them, is her participation in the war and the splendid record of Ulster troops. Where the South of Ireland holds up as one of the gravest injustices from which it suffers, the fact that Ireland is taxed to pay the British war debt, the Ulsterman says with pride:

"We want to pay our share of the debt. We're part of Britain and we'll bear our share of her burdens."

Ulster's greatest fear is that some form of independence or separation from England will come to Ireland, in which case the North, being in the minority, will lie at the mercy of the hostile South. They tell you tales of "Ulster volunteers," armed and ready, by the thousands, to resist coercion from the South.

Probably there would be put up a certain amount of desperate armed resistance, although the South of Ireland leaders scoff at the idea. Arthur Griffith pointed out to me how upon three previous occasions within a century Ulster had threatened to fight if certain measures were put through, and how upon each occasion they had failed to do so. Be that as it may, there is something very businesslike and quietly determined about Ulster's preparations for a break.

Businesslike is the adjective which gives one the keynote of Belfast, and of the majority of Ulstermen. Whereas, in the South the people are sentimental, and feel with their hearts, the people of the North are practical, and think with their heads. They have no more sympathy in Belfast with Sinn Féin or Nationalist aspirations than have the men of the South for Ulster complacency. But they argue as follows:

"To go back to the beginning, we admit that Ireland has been misgoverned in the past. But what did we do? Did we sit down and whine about it, as they did in the South? We went to work. We built up the city which you see here to-day, as much like an American city as any in Europe. From a town of 20,000 we have risen to a metropolis of 400,000. We were almost cut off from the sea by great mudflats. We drained and excavated and developed the largest shipbuilding industry in the world. We have the greatest flax-spinning factories; one of the largest liquor industries; some of the finest municipal buildings in the whole United Kingdom.

"Whenever improvements were made in Ireland, from time to time, it was the South which benefited. We never had a penny to build up our businesses, they are all the result of private enterprise. To-day

Continued on next page